

A FAMILY OF



PEPPERCORNS

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EAT WITH

Carrot thoran, a coconutty stir-fry somewhere between a salad and relish. Mix together 3 grated carrots, a large handful of shredded cabbage, a handful of grated coconut, a finely sliced onion, 1–2 slit green chillies, ½ teaspoon ground turmeric and a good pinch of salt. Heat a little oil, add ½ teaspoon black mustard seeds and let them splutter, then add 6 fresh curry leaves. Stir through the carrot mixture, turn the heat down and cover. Cook for about 10 minutes, stirring once or twice, until tender. Remove the lid and stir-fry for another couple of minutes.

KERALAN BLACK PEPPER CHICKEN

Kozhi kurumulagu ~~~~~ India

Serves 4

Too often a bit part player, peppercorns here shine as the star performer. Used in quantity, they bring a bold piquancy that hints at an early Asian heat before chillies were brought to the continent. This is balanced by their fragrance as well as by a tangle of sweet, caramelised onions. Use tellicherry peppercorns if you can as they are especially grassy and bright.

Pepper is native to the steamy, knotted jungles of the Indian Ghats, thriving in the cycles of heavy monsoon rain and sultry heat. Walk through rural areas during harvest and you will have to weave around patches of peppercorns left out to dry in the hot sun.

8 skinless, bone-in chicken thighs

Juice of ½ a lemon

½ teaspoon ground turmeric

1 teaspoon fine sea salt

1 teaspoon fennel seeds

2 tablespoons black peppercorns

2 tablespoons coconut or neutral oil

3 large onions, finely sliced lengthways

5 garlic cloves, minced

6cm (2½ inches) ginger, peeled and minced
(2 tablespoons)

1–2 green chillies, slit lengthways (optional)

1 teaspoon garam masala

1 tablespoon coconut vinegar or other vinegar

Buttered basmati rice, wilted greens and a tangy-sweet Indian chutney, to serve (optional)

Turn the chicken thighs in the lemon juice, turmeric, salt and a few grinds of black pepper (we are layering the pepper flavour; the full hit comes later). Set aside to marinate whilst you proceed.

Tip the fennel seeds and peppercorns into a dry pan and heat until they are toasty and aromatic. Use a pestle and mortar to crush them coarsely.

Heat a large frying pan over a medium heat, add the oil and fry the onion slices with a pinch of salt until they soften, then turn golden. Add the garlic, ginger and green chillies and stir-fry for another couple of minutes. Stir in the garam masala.

Add the chicken to the pan along with any marinade and the vinegar. Cover, turn down the heat and leave to simmer for 15 minutes. The chicken will release liquid as it cooks.

Remove the lid and turn up the heat. Add the crushed peppercorns and fennel seeds. Stir-fry until the chicken is cooked through and the sauce is dry and caramelised. Taste for seasoning. Set aside to rest for 10 minutes before serving.

Serve with buttered basmati rice, wilted greens and a tangy-sweet Indian chutney, if you like.

GREEN PEPPERCORN ASPARAGUS

Prik Thai orn kab nor mai farang ~~~~~ Thailand

Serves 2 as a side

Picked before ripening, green peppercorns have a verdant grassiness. The spicy piperine in the berries hasn't fully developed, meaning you can use them in a greater quantity than when dried to black. The heat is still sharp, pronounced and interesting, though, here matched with a salty-sweet dressing glazing stir-fried asparagus.

The Thai name for the fresh peppercorns, prik Thai, means literally 'Thai chilli', revealing its position for millennia before the American immigrant spice arrived, seducing everyone with its brash confidence.

250g (9oz) asparagus spears
1 sprig fresh green peppercorns (2 teaspoons)
2 small garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 bird's eye chilli, seeds removed, sliced
1 tablespoon fish sauce or vegetarian fish sauce
2 teaspoons sugar
1 tablespoon neutral oil

Snap the tough bases off the asparagus and cut the stems into short lengths at a steep angle.

Pull the peppercorns from the sprig and crack them using a pestle and mortar, or roughly chop.

Make a dressing by combining the peppercorns, garlic, chilli, fish sauce and sugar.

Heat a wok to high, then add the oil. Stir-fry the asparagus until its green colour intensifies, then splash in a tiny bit of water to create steam. Stir-fry for a few minutes more, until the stems are just tender to a knife. Add the dressing, bubble for 20–30 seconds, then tumble onto a serving plate.



ANATOMY OF SPICE

ROOTS & RHIZOMES	LEAVES	FLOWERS
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Ginger	Curry leaf	Clove
Galangal	Lime leaf	Saffron
Turmeric		Rose
Liquorice		

PODS	BARKS	RESINS
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Cardamom	Cinnamon	Asafoetida
Star anise	Cassia	Mastic
Vanilla		

FRUITS	SEEDS
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Pepper	Nutmeg
Sumac	Cumin
Tamarind	Coriander
Amchoor	Fennel
Allspice	Mustard
Caraway	Nigella
Chilli	Fenugreek
Sichuan pepper	Cacao



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